
Reflective Professional Practice

Thought takes place as internal conversation, having developed through social processes.

—George Herbert Mead (1934)

Who expects small things to survive when even the largest get lost. People forget years and remember moments. Seconds and symbols are left to sum things up.

—Ann Beattie (1986)

Fixing your mind on how your professional practice has affected your students can enhance your wish for self-improvement and get you on the road to action research. To get ready to do action research, reflect on your own professional practice. Professional reflection is self-focused meditation that includes visualizing where you are, where you have been, and where you might go. Like reading a map upon entering a college campus, professional reflection helps you see where you are now (X marks the spot) and alternative paths to reach other campus high spots you might wish to visit later or have visited before. In striving to become a better practitioner, you must move from intelligent assessments of where you are at present to reflect on how to use past and future strategies to realize planned change.

Although professional reflection calls for silence, the social psychologist G. H. Mead (1934) believed that an integral association exists between thinking and social interaction and therefore that reflection is a sort of solitary conversation or internal

dialogue. Ann Beattie (1986), the novelist and my favorite short story writer, pointed to an incongruity between what we expect of memory and what actually occurs. To paraphrase her, we focus our memories on poignant momentary events rather than on accumulations of large blocks of events over time. By getting in touch with your internal dialogues and by remembering a few poignant moments with your students, you can begin to fix on a focus for action research.

REFLECTIONS OF THE FUTURE, PAST, AND PRESENT

The philosopher Martin Heidegger (1962) posited that at all moments of thought and reflection, we dwell either in the future, the past, or the present. Unfortunately, most of us are not thoughtful about differentiating among the three states of time. Thus you who do not think deeply about the future do not measure the results and outcomes of your actions, you who do not reflect critically on the past are not readying yourselves for improvement, and you who do not think of what you are doing in the present cannot often see what to do next.

You think about your future practice when you plan a lesson, put up a bulletin board, design an instructional strategy, or rehearse a behavioral skill. When learning to play the trumpet in the sixth grade, my music teacher prodded me to go over the notes and fingering in my mind before I played. In high school, our football coach told us to rehearse offensive plays in our minds before the games. In freshman English in college, I was assigned to read *Think Before You Write* (Leary and Smith 1951), and my sophomore speech instructor urged me to visualize my audience in my mind's eye before starting my presentation.

Now, as a professor emeritus, I still do not enter the classroom without a teaching plan, nor do I carry out research or consultation without guiding questions and an explicit design for action. For teachers and students alike, reflecting about future behaviors and foreseeing outcomes are essential and necessary stepping-stones to effective action. See Figure 1.1 for an example of a teacher reflecting on the future.

You can also benefit from fixing your mind on your past plans and behaviors, how those plans unfolded, how your behaviors came across to the students, and what happened as consequences. Serious reflection on past practices helps you gain competence, mastery, and understanding, which serve as your foundations of psychological strength when facing the next challenge or a similar event.

Many years after freshman composition, I learned from experience about the power and usefulness of spontaneous, free writing. I learned to start an article, a chapter, or a proposal for funding by rapidly jotting down words, phrases, and clauses without allowing my pen to leave the paper or my fingers to stray far from the keyboard. Then, after reflecting on what James Joyce called the "streams of consciousness" in my initial jottings, I wrote sentences, paragraphs, and outlines. Later, after more analytical reflections, I prepared drafts—writing-reflecting-rewriting-reflecting-rewriting—until I had developed my voice and was satisfied with the lucidity of my statements.

In learning to think clearly about the past, it took me quite a few years to appreciate the power of debriefing—a procedure used by diplomats or soldiers when they reflect upon and mentally assess the conduct and results of a mission. Debriefing can

Figure 1.1 Reflecting on the Future

A teacher is about to meet with the parents of a child who has been difficult to work with during class discussion. She works through the following questions to prepare herself.

What are the disruptive behaviors?

- The student does not listen well, often interrupts other students, and is sometimes discourteous to the teacher.

When does the child disrupt the class?

- The student is most disruptive after lunch.

What are some possible reactions of the parents?

- I wonder if my child is getting too much sugar at lunch.
- Perhaps my child is too advanced for your class and is bored.
- My child thinks you single her out and pick on her.

How will I respond to each of these reactions?

- Maybe we could alter the student's diet over the next two weeks and see if her social behavior improves.
- Your child's assessment scores in reading and math show that . . . [Have assessment scores handy.]
- Your child does not seem to have a close friend in class. Can you help me understand that?
- I reprimand your child only when she is disruptive. [Show parents your written record of disturbances.]
- I reward your child at least two or three times a week. [Show parents your written record of rewards.]
- Let's brainstorm together about some new ways we might try to relate to your child.

apply as well to playing musical instruments or to participating in athletic games as it does to making speeches, teaching classes, carrying out research and consultations, or implementing missions. For all of those pursuits, serious reflection in the aftermath can help you gain competence, mastery, and understanding. Take action first, then think critically and systematically about the effects of those actions before acting again. Doing so will help you zero in on a focus for action research. See Figure 1.2 for an example of a teacher reflecting on the past.

Heidegger pointed out that because our minds typically wander between past and future reveries, thinking in the present is the least used form of reflection. In fact, the most challenging type of reflection is thinking about your present behavior, which calls for you to focus on the here and now instead of the there and then. Reflecting effectively on the future or the past entails segmenting your thoughts into distinguishable episodes to consider the interrelated parts. Reflecting effectively in the present, in contrast, calls for moment-to-moment shifts between doing and thinking and thinking and doing.

In his theory about the development of a self-concept, Mead (1934) conceived of your "I" as your behaving self in spontaneous emission prior to your reflecting on it and your "me" as that part of yourself that you reflect upon. In other words, your "me" is your self-perception from moment to moment. Reflecting effectively on your present behavior requires tight coupling between your "I" and your "me." While behaving, you simultaneously introspect about your behavior. You catch yourself in the act of behaving. Your behavior and your reflection on it happen virtually at the

Figure 1.2 Reflecting on the Past

A teacher thinks about her meetings with parents in the past.

- The last few times I confronted parents about the disruptive behavior of their child, I did not have in mind enough concrete examples of the disruptive behavior.
- The parents saw me as picking on their child. They did not understand how their child's classmates were reacting toward the disruptive behavior.
- I did not connect their child's behavior to the negative effects it was having on other students' learning, nor did I connect it to their child's performance in reading and math.
- I became defensive, and I did not invite the parents to join me in brainstorming alternative actions for each of us to take in trying to change the child's disruptive behavior.
- I do not want to make those same mistakes again.

same time. Reflecting well in the present, a hard task at best, requires you to be sensitive and insightful about the nonverbal reactions of your students. You can find no better launching pad for action research than to become conscious of your students' nonverbal reactions to your instruction.

I think that I am best at reflecting in the present when I engage in one-on-one advising, counseling, or conferring. I can monitor the other person's reactions to my actions and quickly regulate what I say or do next, according to the instant insight I get about the other's changing mental state. As the number of people I simultaneously relate to increases, the challenges I experience in effectively reflecting in the here and now also increases. I am forced to reflect more on the past or future, even as I try to stay in the present. Nevertheless, as I teach, consult, or convene committee meetings, I do strive to remain alert and vigilant to others' current reactions to my verbal and nonverbal behaviors. I know too that a sound way for me to learn about the others' reactions is through action research. See Figure 1.3 for an example of a teacher reflecting on the present.

Although reflections on the future, past, and present are very important skills for you to master to increase your effectiveness, they cannot in themselves solve your problems. Each of us has a limited capacity to improve our practice through reflection alone. We can use reflection to fine-tune our practice but not to create new and innovative practice. The effectiveness of your reflections can be significantly enhanced by scientific inquiry—the systematic collection and analysis of data from your students about your practice. By using research methods, you can move beyond your solitary dialogue to engage your students in “public dialogue” about their experiences in your classroom.

REFLECTIVE EDUCATORS SEEK SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Socrates, the Greek philosopher of 400 B.C., employed a question-and-answer teaching procedure to help his students achieve self-knowledge (read Taylor 1956). I offer my own rendition of the Socratic method to help you know your educator self better. I start with the metaphor of the runner.

Think of yourself as a runner in the past, present, and future: one leg is ahead into the future, the other leg behind in the past, your torso poised in between in the

Figure 1.3 Reflecting on the Present

The teacher meets with the parents of a disruptive student.

She stands as the parents enter the room, aware that she must reach out to them with her right hand while maintaining a broad smile on her face. She invites them to sit down and brings her own chair up close to theirs without a table or desk between them. She searches their faces and physical postures for cues to their comfort and readiness to cooperate. She concentrates on being direct, using only a few sentences, and on maintaining eye contact. Are they looking at her eyes? Do they nod their heads? She looks for pursed lips and listens for sighs of frustration. As she moves the discussion toward cooperative brainstorming of solutions, she is aware of extending her arms out toward them to signal a cooperative discussion. She is aware of using the word *we* several times. As the parents leave, she walks with them to the door, again extending her right hand to shake theirs and aware that she has a smile on her face.

here and now. Yet, as one whole runner, you move gracefully from moment to moment toward your goal.

As a reflective educator in search of self-knowledge, think like a runner as you strive to achieve your professional goals and ponder Socratic questions about your present, past, and future throughout your career. In the present, ask yourself, “What am I doing now? How am I acting? How am I living my values? Are my current actions congruent with my cherished beliefs? Am I practicing what I preach? Does my current behavior offer a standard for my students to imitate?”

You can help yourself answer those questions by becoming more conscious of your own self-concept and of your beliefs and values about human nature.

You can grow toward a keener awareness of yourself by writing in a personal journal about

- The central aspects of your self-concept
- The core concepts that guide your explanations of why students behave as they do
- The most important values or desirable ends that guide your professional behavior

Looking to the past, ask yourself, “How did I develop to be who I am now? Which of my past experiences had the most influence on my current beliefs, values, and behaviors? Who were the most powerful role models of my youth and early adulthood?”

In your personal journal, write about

- Your reasons for wanting to be a teacher (or be in another role in education)
- The characteristics of your favorite teacher or administrator
- Influential people, groups, and events in your life

Fixing your mind on the present, seek to understand how your current practices affect students, parents, and colleagues. Ask yourself, “How am I coming across to those I serve? What are my students’ perceptions of my practices? What are my students learning and feeling? How do my students’ parents assess me as a teacher or as an administrator? How do my professional peers see me as a colleague?”

If you truly wish to obtain self-knowledge, go beyond writing answers to the above queries in your journal and collect scientific data to help answer them. Armed with data from your students, you will become even more concerned about how you can do things better in the future. You will ask yourself, “What changes might help me better achieve my professional goals? How can I increase consistency between my values and my behaviors? What changes should I make in my concepts about what motivates student behavior to get ready for future challenges?”

In your personal journal, complete the following sentences:

- As a teacher or administrator, I prefer to influence students with the following behaviors: _____
_____.
- Significant aspects of my current vision for education are _____
_____.
- When I apply for my next position in education, I will state the following things about myself to highlight my capacity and values as an effective educator: _____
_____.

Figure 1.4 is an excerpt from one reflective educator’s journal.

Figure 1.4 Journal Entry

<p>Reflecting on the Future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The central aspects of my self-concept: active, athletic, extrovert • The core concepts that guide my explanations of human behavior: choosing among alternatives fosters involvements and commitment • The most important values or desirable ends that guide my professional behavior: strive to increase students’ prosocial skills <p>Reflecting on the Past</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My reasons for wanting to be a teacher: to give students of today the wonderful gifts I received from the great teachers who taught me • The characteristics of my favorite teachers: caring, clear, supportive, flexible, understanding • Influential people in my life: my 12th-grade English teacher <p>Reflecting on the Present</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As an educator, I prefer to influence people with the following behaviors: active listening, succinct statements, supportive feedback. • Significant aspects of my vision for education are that cooperative learning and peer tutoring can help develop students’ prosocial skills. • When I apply for a new position in education, I will state the following thing about myself to highlight my capacity and values as an effective educator: I adapt my teaching strategies to student learning styles.

THE SEARCH FOR SELF-KNOWLEDGE LEADS TO SOLITARY DIALOGUE

About 2,000 years after Socrates, William Shakespeare created theatrical soliloquies to express the conflicted and unsettling reflections of such memorable characters as Hamlet, Lady Macbeth, and King Richard III. The reflective-thinking technique of solitary dialogue, similar to what Shakespeare called “soliloquy,” is a conversation between two sides of the inner self. As I said earlier, G. H. Mead likened human thought or reflection to internal conversation or to solitary dialogue. Use solitary dialogue to get a better understanding of yourself and to ready yourself for new actions.

One type of solitary dialogue that could be useful to you is a conversation between your frustrated past self and your hopeful future self. Your frustrated past self uses verbs such as *couldn't*, *defended*, *didn't*, *feared*, *worried*, *rejected*, *resisted*, *struggled*, and *wanted*. Your hopeful future self uses verbs such as *can*, *search*, *seek*, *strive*, *want*, *will*, and *yearn for*. Figure 1.5 offers an example of a reflective educator working through an inner conflict with solitary dialogue.

Another type of solitary dialogue is a conversation between your past courageous self and your future doubting self. Your courageous self uses phrases such as “I bit the bullet and acted, challenged, even though I was in the minority, confronted and spoke up, mastered my fear, and succeeded in overcoming reluctance and reticence.” Your doubting self uses phrases such as “I might fall on my face, will forget and leave out important points, will get stage fright and look foolish, and won't be accepted or respected by others.”

Other types of solitary dialogues that you might try are conversations between your tough and tender selves, task-centered and person-centered selves, pushing and pulling selves, caring and challenging selves, worried and laid-back selves, convergent and divergent selves, and creative and conservative selves. Develop a solitary dialogue that is tailored to who you are and what most you want to accomplish with your students.

Figure 1.5 Solitary Dialogue

The following is an example of a solitary dialogue with the future and past selves:

PAST SELF: When I felt fear and frustration like this before, I didn't listen carefully to others. I defended myself, jumped to the wrong conclusions, and resisted a reasonable compromise.

FUTURE SELF: I will remain cool when under fire. I will strive to listen. I will use paraphrasing and impression checking before seeking to get my own points across. I will try not to project my feelings onto others.

PAST SELF: That's easier said than done. In the heat of anger, I couldn't paraphrase, and when I struggled to check my impressions of others' feelings, I came across as judgmental.

FUTURE SELF: The next time will be different. I am maturing more and more every day. I will strive to let others know that I do understand and empathize with their feelings, even when I disagree with their points of view.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND SOLITARY DIALOGUE LEAD TO PROFESSIONAL MATURITY

As you reflect on your past, present, and future to develop self-knowledge, and as you engage in solitary dialogue, your professional perspectives become more mature. Immature educators focus often on their survival as teachers or administrators. As the immature have experiences and think about what they hope to achieve, their preoccupation with themselves decreases, and they search outside themselves for clues about their students' or colleagues' reactions. Later, with more experience in checking others' reactions, those who feel secure become primarily concerned with outcomes and results.

In their pathbreaking book *Change in Schools* (1987), Hall and Hord wrote about the concerns of teachers who face the challenge of trying new practices in their classrooms. They found that when prodded to change, teachers are concerned first about themselves ("Will I be able to carry out the new practice well?"), later they become concerned about others ("Will my students react well or poorly to the new practice?"), and still later they become concerned about results ("Will the new practice result in better student outcomes?"). Hall and Hord found four levels of concerns about self, three levels of concerns about others, and three levels of concerns about results, as shown in Figure 1.6.

MATURE EDUCATORS TRY TO IMPROVE CONTINUALLY

As a mature educator, you are concerned with continuous improvement in achieving results or in reaching valued outcomes. To reach your desired results, try to segment

Figure 1.6 The Maturing Educator's Three Levels of Concern

Focus on Self	Focus on Others	Focus on Results
Concern 1: Personal security, status, and comfort: Can I survive in this job?	Concern 5: Others' perceptions of behavior, values, and plans: What are others' perceptions of my professional behavior?	Concern 8: Immediate applicability of teachings: What can others do as a consequence of my having taught them?
Concern 2: Professional self-esteem: Do I feel good about myself in this job?	Concern 6: Others' attitudes about behavior: What are others' attitudes about my professional behavior?	Concern 9: Future applicability of teachings: What lasting effects have I had on my students?
Concern 3: Personal values, hopes, aspirations, and plans: Can I make a career in education? Can I achieve my life's goals as an educator?	Concern 7: Effect of behavior on others: What are others' nonverbal and verbal reactions to my professional behavior?	Concern 10: Contribution to society: What long-lasting contributions do my students make to improving our community, nation, and world?
Concern 4: Professional behavior: Are my professional actions congruent with my values and plans?		

your planning, acting, and evaluating into the following ten stages. This sequence of introspective stages will help you move from reflection to action research.

Stage 1: Assess the Situation

Your situation is made up of the people you interact with in the present. In particular, focus on your current thoughts about your students' attitudes and capabilities. Also look at surrounding social events that are helping or hindering student learning.

Stage 2: Set Clear Goals

With thoughtful reflection on your own values and beliefs, you can set goals or targets or objectives. For example, your goal might be for your students to internalize some new knowledge or skill, to act in certain new ways, to develop particular attitudes or values, or to view themselves in new ways.

Stage 3: Brainstorm Action Strategies

To move from your present situation toward goal achievement, use your knowledge and experience to create such action strategies as revised lesson plans, curriculum designs, and instructional procedures. Reflect on your past learning experiences in college courses and inservice workshops; conduct problem-solving discussions with colleagues, consultants, and college professors in the present.

Stage 4: Implement Action Plans

Carry out an action strategy that you created in Stage 3 on a trial basis.

Stage 5: Monitor Your Own Actions

Monitoring your new actions calls for you to reflect in the here and now. Strive to make moment-to-moment shifts between doing and thinking by becoming sensitive to nonverbal reactions of your students.

Stage 6: Assess Others' Reactions

Now think about how you might collect data to assess your students' perceptions and attitudes about your new actions. What research methods might you use?

Stage 7: Evaluate What Others Have Learned

Think about how you might collect data to answer questions such as "Have my students developed the qualities that I was looking for when I set the goals in Stage 2? Are the outcomes or results that I am getting desirable? Have there been any unexpected, undesirable outcomes?"

Stage 8: Confront Yourself With the Results

Compare your desired goals of Stage 2 with the kind of data you might have collected in Stage 7. Look for agreement or disagreement between the two. Confront yourself with ways that you have been effective or ineffective.

Stage 9: Reflect on Actions to Take Next

Here you virtually repeat Stage 3. This time, either fine-tune the action plan you trial-tested in Stage 4 or make a more significant modification if that plan did not work well. If the latter seems appropriate, engage colleagues, consultants, or college professors in problem-solving discussions.

Stage 10: Assess the New Situation and Set New Goals

You have come full circle to take a fresh look at your situation and to set new, more achievable goals. Once you set new goals, recycle through the stages again and again. This is the mental frame of continuous professional improvement.

USING THE TOOLS OF REFLECTION TO MOVE TOWARD ACTION RESEARCH

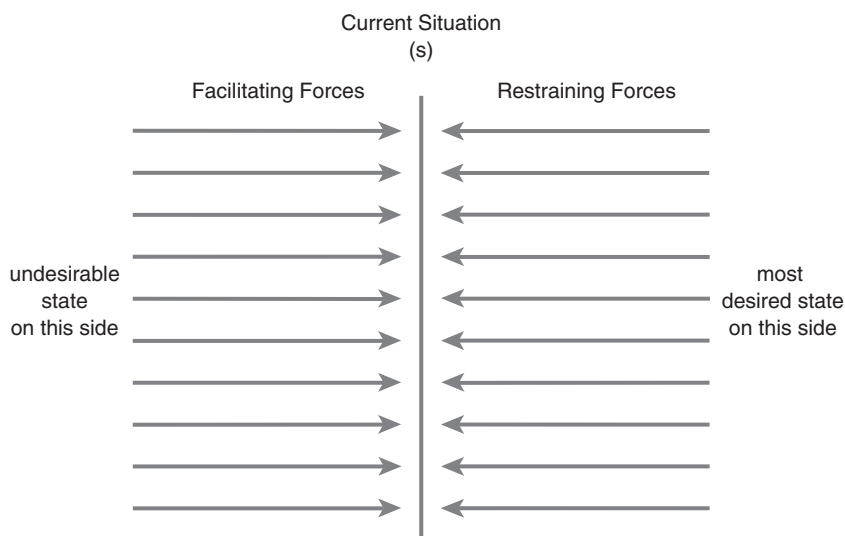
Reflection and action research are two sides of the coin of planned change. By using both, you demonstrate your professional maturity and your value for continuous improvement.

Use four tools of reflection—force field analysis, situation-target-path (STP) concepts, brainstorming versus critical thinking, and self-confrontation—to move toward your own action research.

According to Kurt Lewin (1951), the grandfather of action research, every social situation is in quasiequilibrium, a state of unsteady balance between the actions of opposing forces. Use force field analysis, as shown in Figure 1.7, to obtain a fuller understanding of what might be done to improve your situation.

Visualize your current situation as being made up of a field of facilitating and restraining forces. The facilitating forces are helping you move toward your goals, the desired state on the right of the field, while the restraining forces are hindering

Figure 1.7 Force Field Analysis



your getting to the right and pushing you toward the left of the field, toward the undesirable state.

Once you have listed five to ten forces that characterize your situation on each side of the field, you are ready to focus on topics for your action research. You want either to increase the facilitating forces or decrease the restraining forces. So think creatively about how you might act to do that.

Lewin (1948) taught that it often is better to focus on reducing the restraining forces than on increasing the facilitating forces. My advice is for you to do just that. Think of a focus for your action research that would work toward a reduction in the power of some of the restraining forces in your situation.

A second tool of reflection to help you move toward action research is my own STP paradigm (see Schmuck and Runkel 1994).

In Figure 1.8, note that *S* stands for your current situation, *T* stands for your target, and *P* stands for your path, plan, procedure, project, or proposal. Simply put, your action research will focus either on your *S* (collect data to understand better your situation) or on your *P* (collect data to understand your plan's effectiveness).

Force field analysis and the STP paradigm can be integrated. You can conceive of your current *S* as a field of facilitating and restraining forces held in quasiequilibrium. You create *Ps* to reduce the restraining forces or to add to the facilitating forces. By combining the two tools, you might develop a deeper understanding of your *S*, thereby giving you a broader perspective for creating an appropriate *P*.

A third tool to help you move toward successful action research is to distinguish between brainstorming and critical thinking. Brainstorming helps foster creativity and opens your irrational and intuitive selves. Critical thinking helps foster decision making and opens your rational and objective selves. Both take on a critical function in action research. You should know how to tell them apart and how to do both. In fact, students too should know how to apply the two in classroom discussions and problem solving.

A fourth tool to help you move toward action research is the skill of self-confrontation. Self-confrontation takes place when you are clear about what you value, and you gather data to assess how true you are being to those values. As gaps between your values and assessments arise, you will often feel cognitive dissonance and wish for change to take place. A fundamental ingredient of action research is clarity of values. To zero in on a focus for your action research, try to become super clear about your core values. Then you will want to move from concerns about yourself to concerns about results. Figure 1.9 summarizes the developmental relationships between self-focus, concerns with others' reactions, and the search for results.

Figure 1.8 STP Concepts

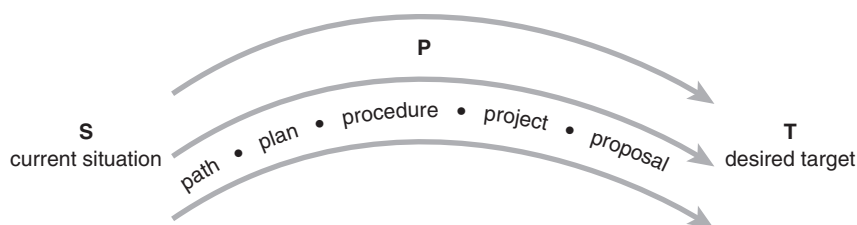
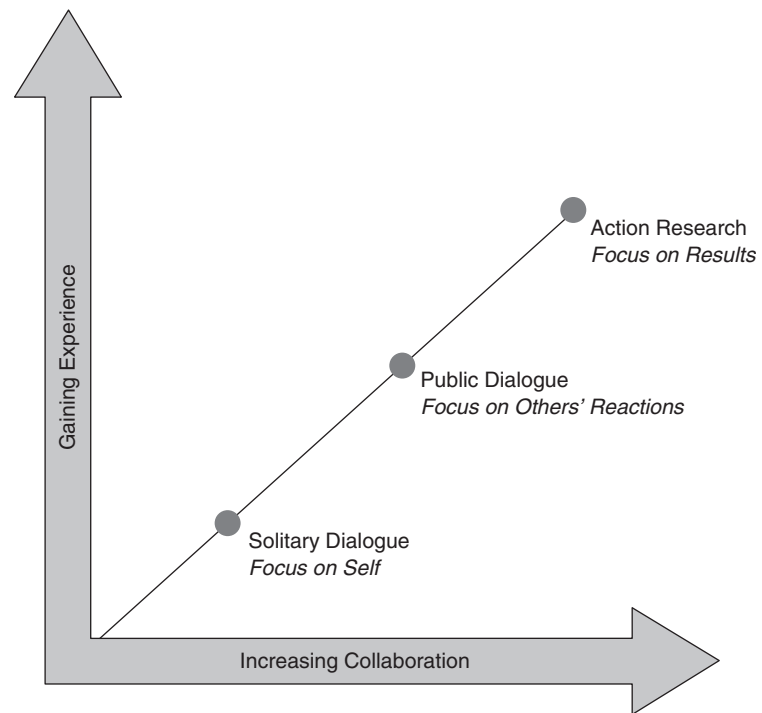


Figure 1.9 From Reflection to Action Research

 **Know Thyself**

Use the following sentence stems to reflect on who you are:

- The central parts of my self-concept are _____
_____.
- The core concepts that guide my explanations of human behavior are _____
_____.
- The most important values or ends that guide my professional behavior are _____
_____.
- My reasons for wanting to be a teacher are _____
_____.
- The characteristics of my favorite teacher are _____
_____.
- The characteristics of influential people in my life are _____
_____.
- As an educator, I prefer to influence students with the following behaviors: _____
_____.
- Significant aspects of my vision for education are _____
_____.
- When I apply for a new position in education, I will state the following things about myself to highlight my capacity and values as an effective educator: _____
_____.

Solitary Dialogue

Think of a challenge you face, will face, or have faced. Write a solitary dialogue to get your values and thoughts in order. Alternate between your past self and future self or between your tough self and your tender self, and so forth.

_____ Self:

_____ Self:

_____ Self:

_____ Self:

_____ Self:

_____ Self:

_____ Self:

_____ Self:

 **Reflections**

Reflect on Chapter 1 by answering the following questions:

1. Do I use a form of reflection now?
2. How might I use reflection more effectively?
3. How can I make solitary dialogue work for me?
4. How might I use the force field analysis?
5. How might I use the STP?
6. What are some of my concerns as a maturing professional?
7. How might I use the ten stages of maturing educators trying to improve continually?
8. What topics for my own action research come to mind?